

A
C H A R G E

DELIVERED

To the C L E R G Y

OF THE

A R C H D E A C O N R Y of B E R K S,

At the late Visitation, in May MDCCLXIV.

By WILLIAM DODWELL, D. D.

Archdeacon of B E R K S. *X*

Printed at the Request of the C L E R G Y.

L O N D O N:

Printed for J. WHISTON and B. WHITE,
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CHARLES

TO THE

ARCHBISHOP

At the late



By William Dowdell, D.D.

Archdeacon of Exeter.

Printed at the Press of Mr. Clancy.

L O N D O N :

Printed for J. Whiston and B. White,

in New Street, MDCCCXIV.

[Price One Shilling.]

A

C H A R G E

DELIVERED

To the C L E R G Y of the Arch-
 deaconry of *Berks.*

My Reverend Brethren,

IT has pleased our right reverend Diocesan to follow the example of his great predecessor in this instance, by selecting one of your own number to act under him in this capacity ; one who is as happy in this respect, however unequal, in others, to your late worthy Archdeacon : one of an unfeigned regard to the doctrine and discipline of the established church, and to the credit of it in

the character and good conduct of its ministers; by which their zeal for it is best to be distinguished and approved, and on which alone their usefulness here and their hopes hereafter depend. The more effectual promoting of rational piety and real virtue was the true design of every office in our church, and the solemn profession of every officer at his admission into it; and to remind us of it, and to suggest the methods of advancing it, was the intent of the exhortations customarily delivered at these seasons.

It may not be easy to say, whether the *advantages* which we enjoy by our profession, or the *difficulties* which attend the profession itself, do most call upon us to be exemplary and zealous in the discharge of our pastoral office. It might be more *pleasing* to dwell on the former, but it may be more *necessary* to attend to the latter.

The primitive writers in their clerical exhortations insist much on the *difficulties* surrounding them, and urge the necessity of a zeal and care proportioned to the dangers and temptations that they were beset with. Whilst
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their religion was *under persecution*, and it was even *capital* to avow their profession, the danger was then very visible to them, and is still very intelligible to us; and if it prevented many from taking upon them this profession, yet being plainly foreseen, and duly considered, it prepared the sincere professors of it for the worst event, and preserved them from deserting it after they had professed it. Very few, in comparison, of those who embraced it upon full conviction and deep meditation, did afterwards *apostatize* in the day of trial; but the serious persuasion of the truth of their religion, the strict discipline of the church, and difficulty of gaining a readmission into it after a lapse, the heroic examples before them, and the frequent admonitions of their ecclesiastical superiors, had such an effect as to cause some to deviate into another extreme; and it was found necessary to add the lessons of prudence to those of zeal, and to restrain even the *desire of martyrdom*.

When *these difficulties* were at an end by the civil establishment of religion, and the temporal powers became the protectors of the

church, yet their intermixture with unconverted heathens, who in many places did long continue to be the *majority*, had its great inconveniences, and required strict rules of behaviour towards *them that were without*, as well as those that were under their immediate care. And when in this situation converts increased daily, and professors of this religion flocked in in great numbers, it was now less easy to discern who became Christians *upon principle*, and who were influenced by *interested* motives with a view to obtain the favour and protection of the great. This called for the singular care and discretion of the ministers of the gospel, to use all such cautions in the admission of the latter, as might not throw discouragement on the others.

The pious superiors of the church in those ages found and represented *other difficulties* even in that event which they so ardently desired, and so duly valued, the *legal establishment* of their religion. They feared that the honours and privileges, which the favour of princes soon heaped on the higher officers of it, would soon induce them to covet those

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offices, for reasons not only distinct from, but even quite contrary to, the original design of their institution; and to apply them, when obtained, to different purposes: and hence their pastoral admonitions became more pathetic and fervent, as if they were now beset with greater dangers. They considered *spiritual perils* as more important than *temporal* ones; and if men had less apprehensions in undertaking the profession and propagation of a religion that was already established, their real danger might be the greater. Whilst kings and rulers were to be opposed, they were prepared with a spirit suitable to the case, and were disposed to do justice to the cause; but when these became members of the church, the governors of it might be apt to relax in their care, when there was indeed occasion for the more critical exercise of it. They were neither by servile flattery to give up their just rights to their noble converts, nor by any usurped authority to interfere with the proper claims of the *civil magistrate*. An impartial perusal of ecclesiastical history will perhaps convince us, which extreme they

were most likely to fall into; whilst they were under constant apprehension of the temptation of *yielding too much* to the great, and whilst indeed they were more versed in and better understood *spiritual powers* than the rules and rights of civil government: yet we cannot but applaud the *piety* of the design, if we sometimes find cause to suspect a *failure of prudence* in the execution of it.

The more compleat establishment of the church, and the after-divisions of Christians among themselves, added some *new difficulties*, and continued some of the former; till these unhappy separations gave advantage to the common enemy, and brought on some of the original distresses which arose from their intercourse with professed *heathens*. It will be a melancholy speculation, but it may be an useful one in the event, if it excite our greater zeal in the discharge of our duty, to recollect the several adversaries, and their several methods of opposition, which we, the ministers of the established church of England, are now surrounded with, and to suggest the proper principles and practices by which we may

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best hope to support their insults, and defeat their influence.

It may be considered as an *honour* in one respect, whatever pain and grief it may occasion in others, that *they* are the most professedly set against us and our profession, who are the avowed contemners of all religion and all moral obligations. To have the same common enemies with piety and virtue, we shall, I hope, esteem no reproach; and the serious and regular part of mankind (whose opinion alone we have reason to value) cannot fail to interpret this to our advantage. There is indeed somewhat peculiar to our times and circumstances in this species of adversaries. The *unbelievers* of whom the primitive writers complained, and against whom they guarded, were not men that were void of all principle. They were *bigots* in the Jewish or Gentile worship, who opposed, and, when they were able, persecuted, the Christian religion in favour of their own. And though the heathen philosophers sometimes talked of *atheists* with great zeal and indignation, yet it may well be doubted whether the persons censured
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were justly liable to the charge; whether this imputation was not brought on them by their neglecting, despising, and ridiculing the established superstitions. They might, and probably did, reverence in secret the Supreme Being, whilst they exposed those public errors which had alienated from him the adoration due only to him.

But that there are really these *minute philosophers* among us, who have discarded first principles, and even disowned their Maker, however hard to be believed, however painful to be thought of, yet cannot in fact be doubted. Writings might be referred to, clearly *atheistical*; and though the authors, if they were charged with it, would deny the consequence, they would despise our judgment, if we should believe them. Any uniform plan or scheme of argument, to which argument might be opposed, is not to be expected in that cause; but an absolute and universal *scepticism* is the real case, and the refuge from the force of solid reasonings. Some confused hints about *nature*, intended to exclude the Author of it, are the general subject of their declamation;
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and it is not easy to force them to one intelligible concession, on which a religious superstructure may be built. Here not learning or abilities are required, but perspicuity only; for upon a clear state of the case the argument is irresistible, and of course conviction is unavoidable. The babe in knowledge may with force reprove the vainest proficient in atheistic philosophy, and may abide by that concise proof offered by the apostle, that *as every house is built by some man, so he that built all things is God*. Effects without a cause, an infinite series of causes without a beginning, a fortuitous concourse of atoms, are absurdities with which it is not easy to believe that men can deceive themselves, or that they can seriously expect answers from others to such hypotheses. Men cannot in earnest ever be brought really to think that they *made themselves*; or that they came hither *by chance*, or that God Almighty made them for *no use or purpose*, without intending to take any farther care of them here, or to call them to any account hereafter. Yet some or other of these, men must be driven to, who have, or would be

be thought to have; *no sense of religion* at all; though they would choose to shelter themselves under a general *uncertainty*, rather than avow professedly either of these particulars. If it is difficult to suppose them *in earnest* in such a profession; it is no less difficult to account for the motives to *insincerity* in such a cause. What can be the temptation to *degrade* themselves in this manner, to cut off every virtuous rule and every pleasing hope; to reduce themselves to such *insignificance* here, and the scheme of being *nothing* hereafter? Surely the *desireableness* of religion, when fairly displayed, is no mean argument of the *truth* of it.

But where this is allowed, and plausibly insisted on, the ministers of the gospel have more prevailing and more formidable adversaries to deal with in the professed patrons of *natural religion*, which is declared to be self-sufficient, perfect, and immutable. These, who by a singular favour are called *deists*, though baptism renounced is no other than *apostacy*, are the avowed enemies of that revelation, which it is our honour and our duty
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to publish, to explain, to vindicate, and to obey. The *sincerity* of their professions we may leave to their own consciences, and to the great Searcher of them, whatever difficulties our own judgment of the plainness of the evidence, and those declarations of scripture which *promise success* to fair and virtuous enquirers, might seem to throw upon such pretensions. There are indeed no inconsiderable *schisms* amongst these unbelievers themselves; whilst some tell us that the *beauty of virtue* is its own evidence, and the practice of it its own reward; whereas others represent it as the mere creature of the *civil magistrate*, to be regulated by *his* decisions, and observed as *his* precepts: and others again ridicule the philosopher and the governor as both mistaken in their schemes; most preposterously pleading it as the design of providence, that the vices of individuals should be beneficial to society. Others, who with indignation have rejected all these palpable absurdities, have endeavoured to supplant revelation by its own assistance; have borrowed its doctrines and precepts, wove them into a regular system, and then

then argued against the necessity of that light that supplied them with it. These compliment their own *reason* with this supposed discovery; though they cannot but know that *reason alone*, antecedently to revelation, never shewed its sufficiency in this manner.

There is no part of controversy in which we who are honoured with the ministry in this age, are more concerned to be well skilled, than in this with the professed *advocates* for *natural religion*, who have some advantages which wilder sceptics and atheistical libertines have not. Who would not think, by their own representation, that these were friends to piety, to virtue, to public order, and to private happiness; to the fear of God, to the love of men, to personal regularity; in a word, to every thing that is praise-worthy? This, if sincere, would be an excellent *preparative* for the belief of the gospel, as it would not only cut off all unreasonable prepossessions against it, but would incline them *to wish* to see that dispensation well confirmed, which would establish their natural religion on surer grounds, exalt it to a higher degree of perfection,

fection, and enforce it by more important functions.

But this pretended love of truth and virtue and goodness does little appear in the treatment which the evidence of Christianity meets with from them, and the stile and methods in which the enquiry is made. Advantage is taken of injudicious concessions or weak arguments advanced by any real friend to our cause; and false appearances of friendship are often put on, on purpose to betray it, to misrepresent the evidence, and to lay the chief strength of it on that which others may see cannot be supported. The truth is, the evidences of our religion are of a *complex* nature, and consist of many particulars, each of which are of great weight in themselves, and well adapted to different dispositions and understandings; and if they are thought separately solid and convincing, yet must be allowed to receive an additional strength from each other; and in their joint force may without impropriety be called *demonstrative*. The testimony borne to Christianity is not merely by the excellency and utility of its precepts,

precepts, by the reasonableness of its doctrines, by its analogy to the course of nature, by the supernatural proof of undoubted miracles, by the completion of numerous, distant, and unconnected prophecies,--by the capacity, integrity, and disinterestedness of its witnesses,---and by the astonishing success of it in the world, without any proportionable human means ;---but by all these *jointly* ; and whilst an attentive, impartial, pious mind is engaged in the contemplation of their united strength, it is apt to be lost in astonishment at the weakness as well as wickedness of gainsayers. Particular difficulties are competently answered by pointing out the difficulty, or rather the impossibility, of setting aside all the forementioned evidence ;---by observing that there are similar unsolveable mysteries in providence as well as in revelation ;---and that we should be so far from getting clear of difficulties by the refuge of infidelity, that we should be involved in infinitely greater ; their whole scheme being darkness and uncertainty ; whilst *we* at least enjoy light enough to direct our practice and
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enliven our hopes. With respect to the repeated charge of *difficulties* in our faith, we may farther observe, that many of them have been shewn to be *imaginary* by the pious and learned labours of some of our profession; whilst some of them may be confessed to be *real*, and may, without prejudice to our faith or practice, be left for a solution to the day of judgment.

When the authority of the Christian dispensation is acknowledged, it might well have been hoped, that *no difficulty* would now have remained, but that of enforcing *obedience* to it. But the case is unhappily otherwise, and the end of this religion has been as effectually defeated by *corrupting its doctrines* as by undermining its evidence. When *natural religion* could not be maintained in opposition to this revelation, it was artfully said to be *the same*, and the gospel was asserted to be nothing more than a republication of the law of nature. Every thing *peculiar* to this dispensation as a *new covenant*, as a scheme of reconciliation of offending creatures to their offended Creator, is exploded even by some

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who pretend to receive the Bible; and force is offered to the express letter of scripture, and to the common sense of every impartial reader of it, to explain away whatever is said upon or implied in the doctrine of *redemption*. The *foundation* of it in the *fall of man*, and the corruption of his nature, is positively denied; the *necessity* of it is evaded by attempts to prove that repentance and amendment for the future, is a sufficient expiation for past offences; the substitution of a *vicarious sacrifice* is represented as injustice; the notion of *any satisfaction* to be made to the honour and justice of the divine Lawgiver is ridiculed; and the *efficacy* of that which we are taught, and are to teach others, was actually made by the meritorious atonement offered by the eternal Son of God, is invalidated by disowning his *divinity*. Thus our *Saviour* is deprived of every thing but an unmeaning name; his disciples of every valuable hope in and through him; and his religion of every thing which distinguishes it from a good *system of ethics*. To represent to you the principles and proofs by which these notions, whether proceeding
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from real or disguised sentiments, are to be refuted, would be to transcribe almost every page of the New Testament. An impartial deist would allow that the doctrine of *redemption* by a divine Saviour is therein contained; for which reason he fairly rejects them together; but the *inconsistency* certainly is the greater in those who allow the authority of the sacred pages, and yet reject the contents of them. Here we have nothing more to do than to accept the concession of fair enemies, and for the conviction of unfair ones to appeal to the sacred writings themselves; to shew that the lapsed state of nature, the insufficiency of repentance, the necessity of a propitiatory atonement, the actual appointment of one by the eternal Father, the meritorious completion of it by the eternal Son, and the effectual sanctification of our fallen nature by the eternal Spirit, are very clearly therein taught.

It is no sort of objection to these doctrines, that they were not discoverable by the *light of nature*; they were opened to us by express *revelation* for that very reason. He who knew

our state and nature much better than ourselves do, and who only could know *his own*; who alone could understand the real demerit of transgressions against his infinite majesty, the proper terms on which they might be rendered pardonable consistently with the divine honour and justice, and the vengeance justly due to them, if unatoned and unreformed, has graciously condescended to manifest to us these important particulars, and to tell us what God has done for us, and what he still requires that we should do for ourselves. Much of this scheme of redemption, and of the *reason* of it, is perhaps still *unrevealed*; and if more of it had been revealed, there might possibly have been more difficulty in our present conception of it; but in that proportion of knowledge which is now allotted to us in this authoritative manifestation of this mystery, there is a marvellous and gracious display of all the divine attributes; an harmonious reconciliation of the divine holiness, wisdom, justice, and mercy. We not only see more of the counsels of God than we could have any pretensions to *claim*, but

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we see enough to answer many plausible enquiries; to obviate many artful objections, and to silence the impious presumption of those who take upon them to dictate to their Maker, and to tell him what he ought, and what he ought not, to do in the government of moral agents. It is painful to hear, and to repeat such impiety; and the fullest answer of all is, that *God alone knows* what infinite wisdom shall direct in the dispensations of providence, and that he has declared his will to us as to the method of his accepting returning sinners, by *setting forth* his Son as a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God. Rom. iii. 25. This is the doctrine plainly set forth in the scripture, often inculcated, represented in various lights, and in every possible variety of expressions that could be conceived; and therefore we might securely rest in it as a divine truth, though we were less able to solve the several difficulties which have been raised concerning the equity of it. We may securely rest on divine authority, and whether others

will hear, or whether they will forbear, it is our duty to declare with the apostle, that *all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.* Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. 2 Cor. v. 18, &c.

After a view of these enemies or corrupters of the evangelical dispensation, who have taken away from the words of the book of life, and framed another gospel, more suitable to their own prepossessions, we are farther called on to guard against those who, by their own authority, that is, by none at all, have made additions to it, and have so clouded the genuine doctrines of Christianity by groundless superstitions, and so perverted them by foreign inventions, that not only the great de-

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sign of it has been defeated by evasions, but the most contrary purposes have been served by this misrepresentation of the gospel as by an immediate instrument. The very *best* religion in the world has been turned into absolutely the *worst* by the corruption of *popery*; for you cannot say worse of any doctrine than that it contributes to prophaneness and to immorality. *Popery*, in the last and most refined state of it, as it stands in the decisions of the *Council of Trent*, is the alienation of our worship from the Supreme Being, which is positive *idolatry*. By confirming the *Council of Lateran*, it has established persecution upon principle, of all who differ from them in judgment, which is plain *inhumanity*. By the consequences of its most express doctrines, it is a dispensation from the great obligations to personal holiness, which is a *system of wickedness*. By the extensiveness and universality of its claim, it is an usurpation not only upon the consciences of individuals, but upon the rights of national churches, for which there is not the least foundation either in scripture, or the earliest ecclesiastical writings.

But though all this is obvious enough to every one who is allowed to read the *Bible*, and to compare it with the decrees of the *Council of Trent*, and one would think there was little danger of converting any protestant who has the New Testament in his hands, and has had no early prepossessions on that side, yet the fact is otherwise; and through ignorance or interest on the part of the converted, through the zeal of the Romish missionaries, and sometimes through the neglect of some of us, the fact is, that great numbers have been perverted from our primitive church to that corrupt communion; wherein, to the great hazard of their souls, they are *allowed* in some instances, and even *taught* in others, to be licentious. And though to every one unversed in controversy, the error of their doctrines and the burden of their ceremonies appear at first sight, yet it is necessary for us, who are to guard others as well as ourselves from their seduction, to be well acquainted with those plausible subtilties with which they endeavour to make proselytes. Their priests are educated in controversy, and perfectly

perfectly instructed to say all that can be said in that cause; and if we do not take pains to understand the foundation of the separation between us, however perfectly we may be convinced of the truth of the protestant religion from the perusal of our bibles, yet we may be at a loss to clear the doubts and answer the arguments with which they endeavour to perplex our people.

Particulars they will generally choose to avoid, especially in their first attempts towards proselytism; but they will harangue on the *infallibility* and *indefectibility* of the church, on the *antiquity* of their communion, and the *supposed novelty* of ours, on the obscurity of scripture, the necessity of tradition, and above all, on an argument drawn from their own assurance and our candour. There is in truth no difficulty in any of these, when clearly stated; but we must be able to state each point clearly, and teach our people to comprehend it distinctly, that they may be guarded on that part where they will be sure to be first attacked. Even the point of *infallibility* is very much a dispute about words, and that
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of the *church* is still more so. No promise was ever made to one particular church more than to another, and the *impossibility of erring* was never promised to any church, nor ever found in any. The belief of every thing *necessary to salvation* is retained by every church that has retained the *scriptures*, and nothing more than this have we any title to expect. *The gates of hell have never prevailed* against the Christian church, because Christianity has prevailed ever since it was first published, and we doubt not will prevail to the end of the world. There has always been a society of men professing the *name of Jesus*, and receiving *his laws* as the rule of their faith and practice; but it has not in every part of it, and perhaps not in any, been entirely free from any mixture of error and corruption. The most corrupt part of it, *the church of Rome*, by retaining the scriptures, had still the *essentials of salvation*, though darkened and overloaded with many unmeaning and many prejudicial superstitions. Where in pious dispositions and honest hearts these have not defeated the effect of a good life and a sincere

sincere trust in God through Christ, there we doubt not of the salvation of their private members, who, implicitly submitting to authority, have not the opportunity of discerning their gross errors. But this is not the case of those whom they are endeavouring to pervert from us, who may have better light, and are to be warned that it is at the peril of their souls, if they wilfully embrace error and folly and superstition.

The protestant religion is in truth much *older than popery*, for it is as old as the New Testament, where we find all our doctrines, but shall in vain look for the peculiar tenets of the Romish church. All the primitive churches in the world were of our religion, for they received the *doctrine of the apostles* as delivered in their *writings*, and so do we. They could not *protest* against the errors of popery before they appeared; and if they had never appeared, we had all been now of the same religion, though not under the same title. In the mean time a *Christian church* there always has been, according to our Saviour's promise, but in some places and at some times

times more or less pure. There were many and considerable churches which never adopted the grossest of the corruptions of the *church of Rome*, and never submitted to its usurped authority. *The supremacy of the pope* was not heard or thought of before the civil establishment of Christianity, when ecclesiastical rights were best understood, nor for near three centuries after. A *patriarchate* was indeed assigned to the seat of the imperial residence, but even that was no more than of *human authority*. The patriarch of Constantinople first made the claim of *universal supremacy*, and was justly reproved for it by the then bishop of Rome, not because it opposed his own pretensions, but because he thought the title of *universal bishop* to be wicked, prophane, and blasphemous (*a*). How little did he foresee that his successors would make the same claim with better success, and pretend to have had it from the beginning? Such information and instruction will enable the members of our church not only to guard against the pretensions of the *Romish church*, but to defend their

(a) Greg. Mag. lib. iv. ep. 38.

own, and to give a ready answer to their most plausible suggestions. And a general answer may always be, that no authority can be sufficient to *alter the word of God*, nor can any argument for a *pretended infallibility* be so evident, as that the only church which lays claim to it, has *actually erred* in the grossest instances; not only by contradicting itself at different times, but by contradicting the testimony of scripture, of common sense, and even of our outward senses; as particularly in the articles of *worshiping saints and images*, of *prayer in an unknown tongue*, of *purgatory*, and that complication of all absurdities, the doctrine of *transubstantiation*.

It is grief of heart to add, that our *difficulties* cease not even here, but that there are other enemies to our established church, whom with great concern we call such, since they agree with us in all the fundamental points already mentioned. Their zeal against universal and licentious scepticism, and against the graver frauds of professed deism; the piety of many of them in maintaining the peculiar doctrines of Christianity against the prevailing schemes of

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and *Socinian* writers; and the warmth of all of them against the impositions and corruptions of faith and practice in the *Romish church*, are with sincerity acknowledged; and the protestant religion has, of late particularly, been obliged to them for many valuable defences both of its evidence and its doctrine. With such as these we should rejoice to go to the house of God as friends, and we would not represent them as adversaries farther than they choose to represent themselves as such. The attacks of our common enemies upon the protestant religion, and indeed upon all religion in general, seem to have had this proper effect, to reconcile us to each other, as deeply interested and closely united in the same common cause. There is a growing candour on each side, which we may wish to see daily improved, without failing in the regard due to that excellent church, of which we have the happiness to be members and ministers. There will always be some persons intemperately warm in each part of this controversy; but though we are still called *priests of Baal*, and favourers of idolatry and superstition, in
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some of their congregations, and some amongst ourselves will hardly allow a *possibility of salvation* to our brethren of the separation, yet in general a better spirit is prevailing, and more charitable sentiments and expressions are mutually admitted and established between us. Even so good a principle and practice as this has been carried to an *extreme*, and has ended almost in a *total indifference* as to the forms of church communion. The apprehension of this may well have caused some to have insisted with great earnestness on the necessity of conforming to and communicating with an *episcopal church*, and should oblige us all to express our regard for it, and to shew that a very *extensive charity* is consistent with a *rational zeal* for our primitive form of communion.

That *episcopacy* was the primitive form of church government for fifteen hundred years after the publication of Christianity, is as certain and known a fact, as that Christianity itself was published and received. If the several orders of *bishops*, *priests*, and *deacons*, as mentioned in scripture, were less clear than upon
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a strict examination they have appeared to be, yet the *succeeding practice* from the earliest times explained the institution beyond all exception; for the first apostolical governors and preachers of the gospel appointed successors in all the churches that they founded; and in the earliest ecclesiastical writers we find several churches valuing themselves upon their antiquity, and upon being able to trace the *succession of their bishops* from the apostles themselves. If their jurisdiction was *less extensive* than in the present state of *diocesan episcopacy*, this may be accounted for from the nearer vicinity of populous cities at that time, and might perhaps induce us to wish that they were *less extensive now*, that all might be under the more immediate care of their proper diocesan: but this does not in the least alter the nature or force of the argument from the *universal establishment* of episcopal church-government from the beginning, whether it was of greater or less extent. Suppose this universal appointment to be by *apostolical authority* only, which is the lowest foundation that can be admitted (for the apostles in all the different parts

parts of the world into which they travelled, appointed every where the same form) who then had a right to reverse it, and to take away one, and that the supreme, order of the sacred ministry, which was coeval with the gospel itself? A *church without a bishop* was a case not heard of for fifteen centuries, and an attempt towards such an establishment would have been anathematized by every primitive council.

If the anathema's of councils are disregarded, yet the precepts of scripture certainly deserve attention and regard. These, speaking of ecclesiastical governors particularly, enjoin us to *obey them that have the rule over us*, Heb. xiii. 17. This injunction of *obedience* is plainly a grant of authority to those to whom it is directed to be paid. These were the *apostles*, and those whom they had appointed to preside over the churches in their time; and in our time they are those whom the national authority has appointed to rule over us in ecclesiastical matters. Whatever controversy might arise upon this question, where *national authority* has varied from *apostolical*
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example, and has established a new form of church-government, never heard of till within little more than two centuries, yet happily this is not the question with us; we have *primitive pattern* as well as *present establish-ment* to plead, and can enforce by every argument that St. Paul could use, the duty of *obeying them that have the rule over us*.

In *what instances* this obedience is to be paid, both the reason of the thing, and the exprefs precepts of scripture, direct us; namely, in such things as are *indifferent* in themselves, but are expedient for upholding *decency and order* in those which are more important. These are the only points in which we can possibly testify our dutiful submission to those that in the church *have rule over us*. In matters of *necessary duty* the obedience is paid to God, not to *them*, and would be binding, if no such ecclesiastical rulers had been at all appointed. In matters which by the law of God are *prohibited*, we must not obey any human authority at all; and therefore the only instances in which we can possibly obey those whom we are so exprefsly enjoined

to *obey*, is in those outward ceremonial observances, which were originally *indifferent* in themselves, but were some or other of them absolutely necessary to support regularity and utility in public worship, and the offices thereto belonging. Such points were left *undetermined in scripture*, because they were sufficiently provided for by leaving them to the determination of ecclesiastical superiors in each particular country, and granting them authority to require obedience to their directions in such cases. It is evident indeed that they would be *better* provided for in this method, because no general laws could have been fixed, which would have suited all ages and nations. A ceremony which may be decent and edifying in one time and place, may be quite the reverse in a distant age and situation, according to *local customs*; and if a catholic and invariable ritual had been fixed by the apostles, the different and even opposite circumstances of different nations would have brought it into contempt in particular countries; and the contrariety of *climates* alone would have made that observance burdensome

in one place, which would have been a proper refreshment in another. But these things, being left undetermined by the *supreme authority*, are referred to that which is *subordinate*, that they may be suited to particular persons and places; and power is given to the respective governors of each to make such appointments, *submission* being expressly required of those who are *under their rule*: which was all the direction that could be given in such a case, to render it useful to all ages and nations. St. Paul very early explained the design of this appointment of church-governors, and of the omission of universal rules, that each might settle them in particular places, when he told Titus that *for this cause left he him in Crete, that he should set in order the things that were wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as he had appointed him*, Tit. i. 5. This was a clear declaration of the end and design of such *delegated authority*, of the reason of the continuance of it throughout all generations, and of the nature of the submission due to it.

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To say then that *nothing indifferent* is to be admitted in the worship of God, that no ceremony should be prescribed by ecclesiastical authority, which is not expressly prescribed in scripture, is to contradict that scripture itself, which supposes some *undetermined* points left to human authority to determine ; which speaks of things *wanting in the churches*, and directs the *rulers* of them to *set them in order*, commenting thereby, as it were, on that other direction, that *all things should be done decently and in order*. That very principle is the strongest refutation of such exclusion of the appointment of *things indifferent* in the public service of the church, since without them *no order, no decency*, could be preserved. Social worship without any stated rules would be absolutely impracticable, and has been found to be so by those whose zeal against ceremonies led them to try the experiment. God, as the apostle says, *is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints*, 1 Cor. xiv. 33. He is the author of this rule, that all should submit to himself in things *necessary*, and to those whom he has

set over the church in things originally *indifferent*, but judged expedient to promote *order*; which both in reason and in fact is the only rule, which can prevent confusion, and preserve *peace in all churches of the saints*.

To refuse compliance with ceremonies, confessed *not sinful* in themselves, only because in our judgment they are *inexpedient*, or even because they are *enjoined by human authority* (for some have carried their objection so far as to say, that things originally *indifferent*, as soon as prescribed, become *unlawful*) is directly reversing the apostolical *doctrine of submission*; for, instead of *obeying*, it is attempting to *rule those that have the rule over us*. There will ever be such a variety of judgments about the use and expediency of things *indifferent* in themselves, that as it is the only point in which *human authority* can justly interfere, so in this there is great regard due to it. If we were to wait till *all* could *agree* what ceremonials in religious worship were right and reasonable, we must wait till the *day of judgment*; and there could be no visible church upon earth, or at least no order, or edification, in
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it. There are so many cautions in the apostolical epistles against *divisions* and *separations*, so many exhortations to peace and unity and unanimity, to a *sameness* of mind and judgment, which can never be expected in any other sense than this of conforming to divine authority in *essentials*, and to human authority in *ceremonials*; that it may well seem unaccountable that men of such unquestionable goodness and judgment in other instances, as many of our dissenting brethren, should not be moved by the force and the piety of this argument. Till this point is established, vindications of particular ceremonies would be endless and unavailing. It were fruitless to make concessions, when more might in the same method be demanded, till a state of entire anarchy would ensue; and some of our own members, who approve of the present constitution of our church, might on the same principle *separate* from it, *because* such concessions are made, as others now do, *because* they are not granted.

I will not detain you with farther remarks on the wilder sectaries, since what has been

already said, will be applicable with still *farther* force against them. Some of them indeed have proceeded so far as not only to refuse obedience to *human ordinances*, but even to *divine ones*, and to deny or evade our blessed Lord's authority to appoint positive institutions. It will put our charity to a rigorous trial, to believe the sagacious ones of that profession to be *in earnest* in the acknowledgment of the authority of the gospel; and it will go beyond the reach of charity to allow them a *title* which they have not taken upon them in the only method in which the divine Author of the gospel has *allowed* his followers to take it upon them. However, whether they mean to *deceive others*, or do in reality *deceive themselves*, no other answer is necessary to these, than the plain repetition of the sacramental institutions as delivered by our divine Master himself.

When we have thus upon rational principles justified our present church establishment, and turn our thoughts to the professed members of it, our labours will rather increase than cease. Some very *strict* and some very *loose* professors

professors of it conspire in different methods to give farther trouble to the regular ministers of the established church.

To every pious heart it is an unpleasing task to speak against any thing which bears the *appearance of piety*, when there is so great occasion to stir up a zeal for the *reality* of it: yet it is necessary for that very end, to detect disguises, to shew that it is *appearance* only, and that nothing but *rational piety* does at all deserve the name. The encroachments of the enthusiasts, now under view, upon all established order, their violations of the public peace, their withdrawing their hearers from the proper duties of their station to imaginary ones of their own devising, their injurious abuses of the established clergy, are as *real irregularities*, I may say, *immoralities*, as any that they pretend to censure. Their adopting of *scripture-phrases* which plainly imply *supernatural* powers, and which they appropriate to themselves in a manner *peculiar* to themselves, that others may understand them so, is a high degree of *impiety*, amounting very near to *blasphemy*: which they themselves, when

When called upon by sensible writers, have been forced to explain away into *nothing*, and to clear themselves from the charge of *prophaneness* by interpreting it only into *nonsense*. Is such gross prevarication to pass for singular piety? Their stigmatizing every innocent diversion as criminal, which neither the laws of God nor men have prohibited, which reason does not disallow, nay which it recommends as salutary both to body and mind, deserves a worse imputation; as it is assuming an authority which no power on heaven or earth has given them, as it is a presumptuous addition to the laws of the gospel, a misrepresentation of religion, a prejudice to the observance of its real precepts, a discredit to the profession, and a burden on the professors. The mischiefs to be apprehended from such irregular teachers and such unauthorized doctrine, have been now explained by experience, by the ruin of well-disposed persons, by avocation from laudable industry, by the neglect of proper ordinances, and of real assistances to piety, by the misapplication of charity, by public confusion, and by the distraction of private persons.

sons. We need not determine concerning the *sincerity* of their leaders, but may leave that to God and their own consciences; but a *sincere enthusiast* is a dangerous member either of church or state, and as much to be guarded against as a *professed enemy* of either, though in a different method. *Enthusiasm* certainly is *not founded on argument*, and therefore it may be difficult to know how to argue with it, or to recover those who are already infected with it; but it is the more necessary to secure others against it, to expose it duly in itself and its consequences, and to shew that it has neither authority, nor reason, nor public utility, to support it, but is absolutely destructive of them all.

Give me leave, my brethren, to observe on this occasion, that whilst we are vindicating *innocent liberties*, it is greatly our concern to see that we make an *innocent use* of them, and that the faithful discharge of our ministry be our first and leading concern, though we do not lay additional burdens upon ourselves, nor deny ourselves what the laws of God have not denied us. These *enthusiastic leaders* have no
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greater advantage than where the clergy are really faulty in their lives, or remiss in their labours. Though their censure of the established pastors, as careless, pleasure-loving, worldly-minded persons, is aggravated beyond truth, and expressed without decency, yet where such a character is *too justly* imputed, there they will triumph with most success; and declamations against their follies and irregularities will be disregarded from one who is supposed to want a cover for his own neglect and indulgences. We cannot possibly be *too strict* in every thing which is really authoritative, rational, and useful. We cannot conform too rigorously to the precepts of the gospel, and the constitutions of the church; nor be too zealous to embrace every opportunity of promoting a like sense of piety, and a like practice of virtue, in all about us. We ought to be solicitous to shew that we endeavour not to do *as little* but *as much* as we can in our ministerial office, in the regular methods prescribed to us; and that we are not aiming barely to *avoid censure*, but to render ourselves *as useful* as possible, and earnestly to promote
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the glory of God, and the good of souls. If we follow this rule, and are known to deserve this character, we may then with some prospect of success oppose the extravagancies of such *irregular enthusiasts*; and our testimony will be regarded when we find it necessary to bear witness against *false appearances* of religion, if the whole course of our lives shall shew that we are much in earnest to establish that which is *real*.

The same uniform strictness of life in every thing which is truly pious and moral, will give weight to our determinations, when we are obliged to declare against some *new indulgencies* which a licentious age is introducing, or against those acknowledged *immoralities*, which have been justly proscribed in all ages. The last and principal difficulty, which we have to contend with, is that which arises from the *loose example* even of those who yet continue sound in their principles. This is not peculiar to any particular time or place, but has been a general complaint among good men in all ages. It is of less importance to calculate the *comparative degrees* of degeneracy

ity in our times, than to endeavour zealously to restrain every degree of it to the best of our power. Whether we are disposed to vindicate our cotemporaries from the imputation of *greater corruption* than their ancestors, or whether we think that there are too flagrant proofs of a *prevailing* progress of iniquity, beyond the example of former ages, yet all must allow that there is *such a prevalence* of it as is sufficient to awaken the *zeal* of all who have undertaken the ministry upon conscientious motives. The daily patterns of obstinate presumptuous sinners, of thoughtless dissolute pursuers of pleasure, of carnal worldly-minded persons, who are totally devoted to schemes of profit, these occur continually to *exercise* the labours of the faithful pastor, and too often to *defeat* them. There are peculiar difficulties arising from the *stations* as well as *characters* of those whom we would reform; whilst some think themselves *above* instruction and admonition, and others keep *out of the way* of them; and others again seem to take a pleasure in opposing every attempt toward their own holiness and happiness.

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If, upon the recollection of these united difficulties, we are apt to cry out with the apostle, *Who is sufficient for these things?* we may answer in the style and words of the same minister of the gospel, that we *can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us*. Such a despair of doing good as prevents the attempt of it, is more perilous than any external disadvantage: for though our prospect from men is discouraging, our hope from God is a strong support. It is *his cause* that we are engaged in, and *his assistance* will not fail to give us such success against all opposition, as shall be to his glory and our own security, if not so extensively beneficial to others as our charity might wish.

In *what method* we may best contribute to all these great ends, a sincere heart, with a little experience of the world, and a deep sense of the importance of religious concerns, will sufficiently instruct us. If a real spirit of piety actuate us, particular directions may almost seem *unnecessary*; if it does not, they will certainly prove *ineffectual*. I will therefore at this time only repeat the necessity, in order to
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capacitate us to do good in the world, of convincing others, as well as of being able to answer it to God and our consciences, that our *duty* is our *supreme care*, and that our other pursuits are all instrumental to it, or at least consistent with it. Pleasurable schemes, which may be innocent in *kind*, may yet be faulty in the *degree*; and temporal advantages, which are far from criminal in themselves, and may even be serviceable to spiritual interests in the application, have yet their temptations, and bear a suspicious aspect to others; and we cannot be too careful to guard against *excess* and *abuse*, and even against the *appearance* of it, whilst reason and revelation justify us in reproofing those who prohibit the use of that which God has not prohibited. But a zealous attachment to those pursuits, of which we can only say that they are *not criminal*, is not the proper business and character of a *clergyman*, and will be sure to prejudice him in the eyes of those who should be improved by him; to whom these pursuits are in their nature *more known* than his retired exercises of religion, his secret devotions, his self-examination, his preparations

preparations for their instruction and admonition, and for his own. Such an abstinence from, and less frequent use of, amusements and lucrative pursuits as religion may not indispensably require, yet *prudence* may often recommend; and such a sacrifice to duty, and to the desire of doing good, will yield more real joy to a pious mind than any diversion or interest can possibly afford. It will give a weight and influence to exhortations public and private, which are never paid to those who, whether justly or not, are *supposed* to perform the service of the church as a thing of course particularly belonging to them; and to spend the remainder of their time in the several schemes of pleasure or profit, which engross the rest of mankind.

Whilst we are attentively thinking of these things, do we not *wish* to bear that character, which may enable us to do most good, which may induce our people to believe that we are most seriously in earnest in our discharge of our parochial duties, and may dispose them to join with us in them with the same sincerity? Or, if after all our endeavours, we can-

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not secure our *reputation* from the misrepresentations of weakness or malice (though an uniform pattern of piety does not often fail of its reward in this respect) then, however, our inward consolation will be the greater, when we can look up to him *who searcheth the hearts* for our integrity, and can appeal to *him* for our real desire of promoting his honour, and the temporal and eternal welfare of our fellow-creatures. This *consciousness of fidelity* in the discharge of our pastoral office, will support us under all the difficulties attending it, will more than recompence whatever we may give up in that service, will give us comfort in life, and joy at the hour of death; and hereafter, *when the chief Shepherd shall appear, we shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*

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